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SUBJECT: HUNGARY'S ELECTIONS: THE ROMA (C-RE6-00145)

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Summary

11. (U) There are an estimated 600-800 thousand Roma in Hungary, yet most Hungarians do not view them as a viable political force. Disagreements among national leaders, social marginalization and poverty, "tribal" differences, and a tendency to focus on short-term, local issues, have resulted in the Roma not establishing strong affiliations with any particular party. The new Roma Unity Party (RUP), however, has managed to field twenty-nine individual mandate candidates in the April 9/23 general elections, and to qualify for representation on the regional and national lists; a first for a Roma party. Still, observers doubt that the RUP will receive even the one percent of the vote necessary to qualify for funding, and some in the Roma community view attempts to create a Roma political bloc like the RUP as a stumbling block to full integration.

Key National Figures

12. (SBU) There are four key Roma leaders, each with his own agenda and philosophy:

- Laszlo Teleki: Teleki, a Beas Roma, is an MSZP MP and the State Secretary for Roma Affairs. A member of Parliament since 2002, Teleki is pro-U.S. and has attributed much of his success to Embassy and USAID programs. Citing the lack of any mention of Roma programs in the most recent National Development Plan (NDP), many in the Roma community have said they view Teleki as ineffective in promoting aid for Roma;

- (SBU) Florian Farkas: Farkas is a FIDESZ MP and head of the Roma Organization Lungo Drom, which is widely viewed as a FIDESZ puppet organization. Farkas was head of the Roma National Minority Self Government (MSG) from 1995 - 2002. FIDESZ has campaigned hard in the Roma community and may win a majority of the Roma vote as a result. Farkas is an Ungro Roma. (Comment: Many here perceive both Teleki and Farkas as "token" Roma who will follow their respective political party lines in order to stay in power.)

- (SBU) Aladar Horvath: Horvath, who is of a mixed Roma background, was the first Roma elected to Parliament (SZDSZ) and he is currently the head of the Roma Civil Rights Foundation. He was also the head of the Roma National MSG in 2002 but internal political squabbles forced him out after just a few months. Andor Urmos, a close friend of Horvath, told Poloffs that Horvath probably has the most altruistic intentions for the Roma community, but his single-mindedness of purpose and unwillingness to compromise makes it difficult

to work with him.

- (SBU) Kolompar Orban: Orban has been head of the Roma National MSG since 2003. Orban, an Olah Roma with a sixth grade education, founded the RUP in October 2005 as an alternative to the mainstream parties. Some Roma attribute the party's remarkable growth to Orban's use of MSG resources for personal political gain and allege that Orban has filled the MSG with Olah cronies (who also dominate RUP).

Roma Groupings

13. (SBU) The Roma community in Hungary is divided into three main "tribes" or groupings, the Roma-Ungro, Olah, and Beas. The Roma-Ungro or "Hungarian Roma" comprise approximately 85 percent of the Roma population and are the stereotypical "Hungarian Gypsy." Spread throughout Hungary, many Ungro do not speak a Romani language. The majority of assimilated Roma come from this group. The Olah Roma make up fifteen percent of the Roma population and are situated mainly in the eastern part of Hungary, where many of them live in extreme poverty. The smallest group, at 3 percent are the Beas, who primarily reside in southern Hungary. The Beas tend to be the most traditional, "old-fashioned" Roma. Tamas Csik, director of a Roma news webpage and a Centrum Party national list candidate, told poloffs on April 4 that "although we don't like to discuss it, "tribal" affiliations make a difference in which candidates we support." In an April 5 meeting, Laszlo Teleki also told poloffs that "tribal" affiliations do make a difference as "tribal" leaders are important decision makers. According to Teleki, attempts to influence the Roma vote will often go through the "tribal"

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leaders. (Comment: It is likely that such leaders are often approached for help in vote fraud has well.)

"The Roma Have Never Had a Martin Luther King"

14. (SBU) Ferenc Fodor, a non-Roma staffer for RUP told poloffs that the reason the Roma have never united as a political force is that they "have never had a Martin Luther King." According to Fodor, none of the other Roma leaders are charismatic enough to unite the whole group. When pressed about why there they had differing political agendas, he observed that, realistically, most of the leaders rely on their political office for their livelihood and tend to support Roma interests to those of their respective parties. Tamas Csik suggested that social and education differences also play a role, comparing Orban's sixth-grade education to Horvath's college background. Other Roma have expressed their concern over their feuding leaders as well. In March, Roma businessman and FIDESZ supporter Sandor Danyi told Poloffs that the only way for the Roma to move forward would be for Teleki, Farkas, Orban and Horvath to put aside their personal agendas and unite for the long-term benefit of the Roma.

The Roma Unity Party:
Integration, Not Assimilation

15. (SBU) The RUP's campaign slogan is "For the Future, for work, for respect, for ourselves" and its underlying theme is "integration, not assimilation." Fodor explained that the RUP envisions a society where Roma are identified as Roma without fear of discrimination. The RUP platform calls for the following:

- employment opportunities for Roma, including state support of Roma businesses;

- educational opportunity, including vocational training, subsidized school food programs and an end to segregation;
- elimination of the most dilapidated settlements where an estimated 150 thousand Hungarians (Roma and non-Roma) live in extreme poverty;
- a focus on Roma identity and culture in all aspects of the party's platform.

¶6. (SBU) The RUP is fielding 29 individual candidates (including three non-Roma) in ten counties, and the party has also qualified for county list ballots in eight regions and even the national list; unprecedented for a Roma party. Speaking realistically, Fodor said that only one candidate has a chance of winning election, but the party hopes for several third-place finishes. If the RUP gains one percent of the vote, it would qualify for government funding, and Fodor claimed that other parties would then recognize it as the party to work with on Roma issues. Fodor thought the RUP had a chance to win one percent of the vote. Csik predicted that RUP would not attain one percent of the vote. Csik, who does not like Orban, predicted that if RUP won one percent of the vote and received GOH funds, it would allow Orban to solidify his hold over the National MSG. (Note: Csik himself has political aspirations. He told poloffs that he plans to leave the Centrum Party and form his own "Roma Alliance" party before the next election.)

FIDESZ Populism for the Roma, Too

¶7. (SBU) Dr. Andor Urmos, Head of the Equal Opportunity Ministry's Department of Roma Integration, and himself an SZDSZ sympathizer, told poloffs April 6 that he expects that FIDESZ will receive slightly more Roma votes than the other parties. Urmos attributed this to FIDESZ's aggressive courting of the Roma. According to Urmos, the Roma have not traditionally identified with, or voted en masse for a particular party because they tend to focus on short term and local issues. (Comment: Much of that focus is the product of poverty, which politicians often address through populist promises or outright bribery.)

¶8. (SBU) Despite the expectation that many FIDESZ supporters would be unsympathetic to Roma issues, Urmos suggested that FIDESZ was able to appease its base by couching its promises in racist terms. As an example, Urmos quoted FIDESZ

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President Viktor Orban promising "housing and work for Roma who are eager to work and learn." Roma susceptibility to FIDESZ appeals is also anomalous given FIDESZ's usual nationalist and xenophobic bent. Urmos mentioned that many in the Equal Opportunity Ministry were concerned about comments FIDESZ deputy prime minister candidate Istvan Mikola had made earlier in the week about his vision of a "pure and wholesome" society, a Hungarian phrase loaded with distinct racial overtones. Urmos speculated that many Roma brushed aside such comments; attributing them to "everyday racism."

The Liberal Approach

¶9. (SBU) Urmos also said that MSZP and SZDSZ should be viewed as the parties of the Roma, but that Prime Minister Gyurcsany has been noticeably silent on Roma issues. Per Urmos, there are two possible reasons for this. First, in 2002 then MSZP Prime Minister Peter Medyessey made extravagant promises to the Roma, which made him popular, but were not fulfilled. Perhaps, said Urmos, Gyurcsany is not making a fuss about the Roma in order to avoid drawing

attention to the MSZP's track record. The second reason, according to Urmos, is that Gyurcsany is an idealist, who refuses to differentiate between Roma Hungarians and non-Roma Hungarians. Gyurcsany, said Urmos, believes that poverty and lack of education in the Roma community should not be viewed as Roma issues but as social issues. This is the true liberal view on minority issues, said Urmos, and the reason he does not support the RUP. On the contrary, Urmos added, true integration will have arrived when Roma are genuinely represented in all parties, including even the far-right MIEP.

The Road Ahead

¶10. (SBU) The typical Hungarian view of Roma in politics is that they are apathetic and easily manipulated and therefore of no political consequence. All interlocutors (including Roma) agree that Roma are often the pawns of fraudulent voting. However, Dr. Urmos claimed that an estimated sixty percent of Roma voted in the 2002 elections, and Laszlo Teleki asserted that the same percentage of Roma as Hungarians vote. The rapid development of the RUP and FIDESZ's assiduous courting of the Roma community demonstrate that there is at least some interest in Roma as a potential vote pool, but what path the Roma themselves will take to greater representation is not yet clear.

¶11. (U) Visit Embassy Budapest's classified website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/budapest/index.cfm
WALKER